

# Movie Makers

October-November, 1998

Volume 8 No. 5

The American Motion Picture Society

## "HUH?" The Judges Didn't Get my Movie!

**H**uh? Ever work hard on a production, spend lots of money entering it in a festival, only to have it rejected and returned to you with the judges only comment "Huh? I didn't get it."

While its not the comment that any producer would want to receive. "Huh? I didn't get it." can be a typical comment that is returned.

In order to avoid the "Huh's?" consider the following:

**KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE:** Videos and films are created so they may be experienced by others. As the producer/director you must carefully consider who will be watching your work. You might even write out a character sketch of who you are targeting.

**KNOW YOUR FESTIVAL:** Don't send your entry to just any festival. They will all take your money regardless if your production really fits with the festival. Take some time to investigate potential festivals. Often festivals are very specific about the type of entries they want. And often festivals are very vague. These festivals are the ones to carefully consider. When in doubt call up the festival's coordinator, you can learn



*Videos and films are created to be experienced by others. Know your audience.*

a lot from a telephone call.

And obviously, if your entry was produced on video, film only festivals will not accept it.

If the festival has a web page, look it up. Try and find out who past judges and past winners were. Often though, having only a name or a title isn't enough. You need to find out about the background of the judges and the content of the winners. Compare the judges' information with your audience profile. Do they match? Does your content fit with

*(Huh? Continued on page 3)*

## A Special Gift

**A**MPS is pleased to announce that a generous gift has been given to the society. Rose Dabbs, a New York AMPS member has contributed \$1,000. Tentative plans for the contribution revolve around offering a contest for video/filmmakers of school age. There would be cash prizes for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place. Its felt that this type of contest will serve as encouragement to young producers and hopefully serve as a catalyst for more involvement in AMPS. Topic choices and information is coming.

## Recent AMPS PR

**A** video club in England wrote recently to see if someone could help them locate a video club in the Philadelphia area. The club is located in the town from whence William Penn departed jolly old England for the colonies. They are making a movie about him and need some footage of places involving Penn. Contact was made with a video club in Philadelphia plus a member that is listed in the SAVAC membership roster. The member and the club's vice president both responded indicating they would help. The VP of the club has even made a movie about Penn which he volunteered to send to the English club. Would you believe, the individual member was also from England!  
Roger Garretson

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## Movie Makers

Dedicated to the interests of the Serious Motion Picture Maker.

**Vol. 8 October-November, 1998  
No. 5**

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**George W. Cushman**  
Founder,  
1909-1996

Matt Jenkins, Editor

The AMERICAN MOTION PICTURE SOCIETY is not connected with any other organization, society, club or association. The Society does not offer dual, club, nor group memberships.

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## From the Editor

**W**hen I begin putting together the newsletter, I like to have a theme or themes to center the articles around. Audio and judging are two areas of interest in this issue. Audio in video production is more important than ever. A friend often tells the story of how excited he was to go to work for a major television network. He was excited because it was a chance to work with some "real" professional equipment. However, to his dismay, when he started working at the network, the audio board was homemade! Those days are over. With the advent of stereo, hi-fi vcrs, digital, CD quality audio delivered via satellite or cable, audio for video production cannot be ignored.

Besides the audio articles, be sure to read the call for new leadership. As stated, AMPS is in transition and its a great time to have input!

A big thank you to AMPS member Rose Dabbs. Her generous contribution will allow AMPS to provide a venue to showcase young video/film makers productions. Be sure to read about her contribution in this issue.

Roger Garretson needs to be recognized for his efforts in attracting new AMPS members. This phenomenal effort greatly helps our organization. Thank you Roger and welcome new members!

Remember letters to the editor are welcome but also consider writing an article as well.

Finally, if your membership is due, please renew it. AMPS can only grow with your participation. Sure, it may only be a newsletter arriving in your mail box once every other month but that's because we need your input. How about a weekend seminar on production? Who's willing to take on this type of endeavor?

Matt Jenkins

## Officers Needed

**I**t's time once again to elect new officers for the AMPS organization. We are looking to fill the position of Vice-President as well as directors to serve on the board. No experience is necessary. Only the eagerness to contribute to the rebuilding of AMPS. The organization is in a transition period right now, so it is a great opportunity for some one who would like to get involved in what can be a very rewarding experience. All interested parties should contact:

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*Editor's note: Ernest Smith, current Vice President, will become the next President.*

## Remote Control Needed.

**S**everal years ago, Canon USA manufactured a small device called the ZR-1 which would control their camcorders and other manufacturers that use the Control L interface. Using the device, the operator could stop/start recording remotely, zoom the camcorder's lens and preview footage. All of this was done with a wired remote control.

Unfortunately, Canon has discontinued manufacturing the ZR-1. Sony sells a tripod that has a similar control built in, but the control is not available separately.

We have a lot of innovative members within AMPS and we were wondering if someone has figured out the circuitry to do these functions. If so, would you be willing to submit your idea to the editor and we will publish it.

Roger Garretson

*("HUH?" continued from page 1)*  
past winners? If the answer to either question is no, don't bother sending the entry in.

**KNOW THE CATEGORY:** be sure you enter in the proper category. After all, the festival is going to take your money anyway!

**WHAT ABOUT PRE-SCREENERS?:** Many festivals have a committee who will pre-screen entries and sort out inappropriate work which will never make it to the actual judges. Is this fair? After all you did plunk down your \$40 to \$60 to enter in the first place. Sometimes the sheer volume of entries necessitates a preliminary weeding out of entries.

So who are the pre-screenerers? If the festival is sponsored by a university, usually the pre-screenerers will be students, graduate assistants or faculty members. Is your production geared toward that group? If it is an independent festival, the pre-screenerers could be the festival coordinators, or even volunteers. Is your production geared toward them?

Also, it is interesting to receive comments from multiple judges. Often the very thing one judge loves, the next one hates. This type of inconsistency is called having poor or low inter-rater reliability. The judges have not been trained to agree on what is considered good and what is considered to be poor production. In academic research, if poor or low inter-rater reliability occurs, (the judges or observers don't agree what's good or not) then the results are probably not valid.

Judging is subjective and there are no guarantees. So spend a little time investigating the festival and trying to match up your program with the proper festival.

Matt Jenkins

## Letter to the Editor

To the Editor:

I have to agree with Stan Whitsit ("Get It In Writing," Aug-Sept. '98) that a written script is helpful and often essential, in making a coherent movie. In fact, I usually spend at least as much time on my script as I do on any other single portion of my project, including shooting and editing. If nothing else, it provides a checklist for the minimum number of scenes and shots needed for a movie. Life is SO much easier when you have every shot and every scene you need — BEFORE you begin to edit. (Is this sounding suspiciously like the voice of experience?)

Likewise, I can't disagree with Stan's observation ("Three Strikes and You're Out") that a movie is made or broken during editing regardless of the quality of footage and plot.

I take exception to Stan's comments, however, categorically stated once in each piece, that narration must closely follow the image being projected or displayed. He says that when "narration is saying one thing while the audience is watching totally unrelated images" and when "the narration describes something that is not in the picture," viewers are confused and disconcerted.

Not always true. Take for example, the popular MTV technique called "Pop-up video," in which a stream of consciousness set of factoids is overlaid on music videos. Thoroughly enjoyable, especially when the factoids are interesting.

Also, consider Ephraim Horowitz, one of the best amateur movie makers in the world (and a member of AMPS, by the way). Eph consistently produces brilliant, delightful movies, often using a voice over technique that keeps his audience entranced. He may be relating an anecdote or propounding

a theory or elucidating a smidgen of history or describing a fragrance, as you watch what Stan considers a series of "unrelated images."

In fact, it was Eph who told me that using the soundtrack to describe what the viewer is seeing is almost a certain formula for a deadly dull movie.

Eph's technique is so effective, I think, precisely because of the sophisticated viewing and listening that he requires of his audience. When you have seen one of Eph's movies, you have been both entertained and informed, because the information content is multiplexed. Your brain processes two channels of information simultaneously and the effort is rewarded with a feeling of gratification that would not be achieved otherwise.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to remind Stan that his use of the words, "filmer" and "filmmaker" is no longer appropriate in this age of filmless movie making. Needless to say, however, his time-tested observations are as applicable to video as they were to that four letter "f" word of yesteryear.

Mark Levy,  
Binghamton, New York

*Editor's Note:*  
In many magazines and periodicals, the term film is generic for any kind of moving picture.

## AMPS FESTIVAL

Results of the American Motion Picture Association American International Film and Video Festival are expected November 15th, 1998.

# Here Comes Da' Judge

**H**ow many of you have entered a film in a contest? . . . when you send it away, you just know that the film is the best movie since "GONE WITH THE WIND"...RIGHT??? Now as you contemplate that \$50,000 First Prize...or drool over the new Cadillac Seville Second Prize, or even look kindly on that Third Prize which is a five year supply of Preparation H, you know there is a barrier that must be overcome...Standing between you and all that money and glory is, ...gasp!!...choke!!...da' judge!!!

In this article I will discuss judges and their diabolical plots to screw you out of that award your film so richly deserves.

**POINT No.1...** The judging panel is usually a mixed bag. There can be professionals from the industry (they're tough), amateur film makers, people who have never made a film in their life, but watch a lot of TV,...or, the Contest Chairman's wife who is filling in for the guy who called at the last minute to say he was having a bad hair day and couldn't come as he promised. In other words, it could be someone like you.

**POINT No.2...** Many judges are unreasonable S.O.B.'s!!...They expect a film to be well photographed,...they expect a film to have a good sound track,...they expect a film to maintain a semblance of continuity, and to express its idea, or tell its story without straining their mental capacity trying to figure out what the film maker is trying to say.

If we study the many opinions on, and definitions of a film by famous people, it can cause us to have a more charitable view of judges and their task of sorting the sheep from the goats. I am going to quote a few:

"It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing..."

That quote is from that famous filmmaker, Bill Shakespeare, in his big hit "MACBETH", which won an Oscar in the year 1606.

Ivan Passer, the Czechoslovakian director put it this way. "What is most vital to me in the cinema, is not the story or the action, it is the intonation."

Orson Welles observed, "The cinema has no boundaries, it is a ribbon of dream."

Then there is the observation, "Movies must have a greater impact than mere subject recognition and movement." I am not sure of the author of this statement, but I think it was either Ben Andrews or Margaret Chamberlain.

Probably the one that would be easiest for us to make sense of, is from Don Hewitt, the creator of the TV program "60 Minutes." He said, "My philosophy is simple. It's what little kids say to their parents, 'tell me a story'. Even the people who wrote the bible knew that when you deal with issues, you tell stories. For instance, the issue was "evil"; the story was "Noah". I've had producers say 'We've got to do something on acid rain'. I say, hold it!...Acid rain is a topic. 60 Minutes doesn't do topics. Find me someone that has to deal with the problem of acid rain,...now, you have a story!"

Let's start with the basics of the subject. How do we define a movie? The simplest answer is "a movie is a story told by using moving pictures as a vehicle." the big variable is the manner in which the story is told. The judge's job is to determine how good a job the film maker did in getting his message across.

Here we are dealing with very subjective entities. There are no two people in the world that agree exactly on what makes a good movie...There may be two, but I have never met them. Each individual has fixed in his

mind, the characteristics he considers important in a film.

The last twenty years of my working career was spent in the numbers game. We often had to sell a set of figures to parties that had exactly opposite goals....We had a saying as we went out to do battle, "If you can't lay 'em low with logic,...baffle 'em with B.S.". Judges see a lot of attempts to baffle with B.S. in this video age. The current video equipment has such an array of exotic capabilities, it is temptation to incorporate all the fancy stuff into the production whether it is appropriate or not. Try to have your production say more than, "I have this great toy that does incredible things with moving images".

As you are putting your festival film together, you must remember the judges are probably going to see your film one time,...so you have just one chance to convince them that your entry is worthy of consideration. As you work on it, think of it as a judge would see it.

What is the first thing the judge sees?...He sees your titles,...and, if the titles are creative and well done, you have made a good first impression and put him in a positive mood. Titles are one area where we have complete control, so there is no excuse for sloppy titles or graphics. Next he will see the photographic skill employed...Are the shots steady, or does he see handheld shots jiggling all over hell's half acre? How about your colors? Are they bright and vibrant, or are some scenes washed out and others too dark, or in the case of video, bleeding together? Consider the focus...If you have fussy images you are probably losing ground. Most judges hate blurry pictures.

By the time the panel has noticed the above, they have begun to get a feeling of the continuity and how the story is developing. Usually, by the time the (JUDGE continued on page 5)

(JUDGE continued from page 4.)

judges have seen one third of the film, it is obvious whether or not it is a contender.

#### So, what am I saying???

There is no secret formula, no magic bullet. What it boils down to is,...Judges look for the basic stuff that people have been preaching to us over the years, and we have all heard it a thousand times. If you concentrate on your story and do a good enough job of telling it, judges will often overlook minor technical flaws, because the story is the all -important ingredient.

Now that I have you thoroughly baffled by my B.S., and before I ride off into the sunset, let me summarize all the sound and fury by saying,...in the final analysis, unless you have one of the few entries that stand head and shoulders above the rest, a film competition is a crap shoot. The number of films in the competition, and the personal impressions of the judges, determine the odds whether or not your film will end up in the winner's circle.

From personal experience, some of what I thought were my best films, never got out of the starting gate, while others that I ranked as only passable, were winners over entries that I considered vastly superior.

If you follow festivals regularly, you have probably noticed over the years that certain films were entered a number of times in contests, without any success. Then one day they turn up on the list of winners. I don't think all the other films got worse, or that one suddenly got better.

As amateurs, most of us make films because we love to. We make them about topics that interest us, or we care about. In other words, they reflect our interest and desires. You have probably heard me say this, or read it in my columns more than once, if you are happy with your creative

efforts, that is more important than whether or not they win awards.

Of course, if da' judge sees fit to bestow an award on your creation, it is icing on the cake. That affirms that others share your satisfaction with the effort. That is a fitting ending for an ego trip, which is what our films really are.

Stan Whittsit

## Writing for the EAR

**W**riting for the ear is much different than writing for print. Readers have the luxury of turning back a page and re-reading a passage which isn't understood. Film goers and television viewers may not have the ability to rewind the show and replay a part they didn't hear or understand. So the key is to keep it simple! turn on the evening news. Is the anchor speaking with big complicated sentences? No. So why should your characters speak that way?

Many writers cringe at the mention of the word formula. How dare anyone put writing into a formula! Yet if you are concerned that your script is too verbose, then try this formula. For each sentence, count the words that have more than one syllable. For instance, the word "hat" would equal 0 since it has only one syllable. the word "only" would equal 1 since it has two syllables. The word "syllable" would equal 2 since it has three syllables.

If the sentence has a total count of 20 or more, then you should re-write it, making the sentence more simple.

Matt Jenkins

## The Sound of the Sound in Movies

**W**hich is better to say, *the sound of the sound* or the *sound of the audio*, in movies? It probably makes no difference, but to me audio sounds too technical when I am trying to describe the impression you get about a movie. It is how we perceive the **sound**; as the visual images and the story, that form our impression, good — bad or indifferent, when we experience a movie. Notice that I used experience rather than see since we hear as well as see and sometimes feel a movie.

It used to be that when we want to the movies we heard and understood every word the actor spoke and perceived every sound that the director intended we hear. Today when we go to a movie we get lots of noise made up of a mixture of special sound effects, vibrations, music and voice. How well we can pick out the voice and understand the words is too often in doubt. Maybe it is just my old ears but I think I am not alone.

In making amateur movies our resources of equipment, talent and support staff are miniscule compared to that of the movie industry. However our amateur equipment is capable of making very good enjoyable movies if we follow all the good how-to information we have available. Available acting talent is usually amateurish but acceptable to our friendly audience. We make up for lack of a huge support staff by wearing many hats.

One of those hats we wear should be a mixture of all the many sound specialists, who work together on a

(SOUND continued on page 6.)

# Upcoming Festivals

Close Date	Festival Name & Address	Open to:	Subject	Formats	Time Limit	Entry Fee	Award	Show Dates
11-10-98	IUTYT- Klub Kultury, Hradebni 1198 CZ-686 60 Uherské Hradiště, Czech Republic	ADE	G	MHJ	40 MIN	?	T	Nov 27-28
N/A Not Announced or Not Available Please include a self addressed stamped envelope with your entry request								
A Non Commercial B College Student C Hi Sch Gr Sch	D Independant E Commercial F Restricted	G Open H S8 J 16mm	K Other L 3/4" M VHS	N SVHS O 8mm P Hi8	Q Invitat'l R Regional S Exceptions	T Cash U Trophies V Certificate	W Other Award X Approximate Y It Varies	

(SOUND continued from page 5.)

movie, to produce the **sound of the sound** in our movie. Look now at some of these sound hats and how to wear them.

## The sound of music

Music can do more to make a movie from a video tape or film than most of the other things we can control. The visual images may be the most important but without music we have a dull movie.

Music should be selected to match the mood and pace of the movie. Travel movies should be accompanied by background music that is light and easy not heavy or driving and usually not vocal. It is useful to include, or use throughout, ethnic or colloquial music of the travel area visited. I usually record or buy CDs or cassettes of local music when on a vacation trip. If musicians are performing in or near the scenes you are taping try to record the music. Find a location with a minimum of extraneous noise, particularly talking and use the best microphone you have with you. Use earphones to be sure of what you are getting and try to get a complete passage of the music. Documentaries may have one musical theme paced to the subject matter. Scenarios will usually have several themes to suit the various moods of the story. If live music is available and suitable, it can be prerecorded or recorded with the scene.

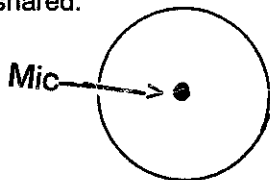
Jim Beach

## Microphone Pickup Patterns

**D**ifferent microphones are designed to gather sound in different ways. As a filmmaker or videographer you need to recognize and when to use different pickup patterns

### OMNI DIRECTIONAL PICK UP PATTERN:

Mics constructed with this pattern will pick up audio equally well from all sides. Applications would include interviewing situations when one person has a mic and it has to be shared.



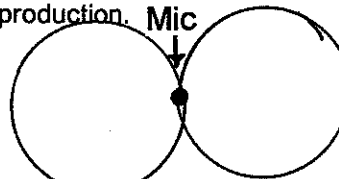
### UNI-DIRECTIONAL PICK UP PATTERNS

Uni-directional pick up patterns are broken down into three sub-categories: bi-directional, cardoid, and super-cardoid.

#### BI-DIRECTIONAL

Bi-directional microphones pick up equally well from opposite directions. Originally designed for use in radio so two people can face each other and share the same mic, this type of mic

isn't recommended for film or video production.



#### CARDOID

A cardoid pattern microphone is great to use when using multiple mics to capture a live performing group and you want to separately control each instrument or vocal. The pattern is narrow and prevents extraneous noise from being picked up. Its great to use in noisy places.



#### SUPER CARDOID

Super Cardoid or a "shot gun" mic is great to use when trying to record sound over a distance. For example, you are on the sidelines of a football game and you want to use the mic to pick up sounds on the field.

Use this type of mic when the mic cannot appear in the shot. Put the mic on a mic stand or on a booms stand and position it above the person out of the frame.

